

Bechukotai 5774

BS"D Parashat Be'chu'ko'tie 5774

The Tochacha & Mashiach

The parsha contains HaShem's dreaded warning (tochacha) regarding the fate of the Jewish nation if we breach the holy covenant by abandoning the Torah way of life.

The humble number of ten million or so halachic Jews in the world after 3500 years of nationhood, is concrete evidence of the tochacha's lethal reality. Whatever evil and suffering that could befall a nation has happened to the Jewish people, including several human catastrophes not mentioned in the tochacha, like gas chambers and crematoria.

Throughout our galut experience, the Jewish nation has sought a light at the end of the tunnel; a sign that our suffering is drawing to a close, a rapprochement with our Father in Heaven. It was to happen through a human being who would lead us out of the galut to return home to Eretz Yisrael; to continue our intimate relationship with the Creator, so dramatically and drastically interrupted when our holy Temple was destroyed.

The title given to the long awaited savior of our people was and is "Mashiach".

In our long history there have been more than a few false messiahs. The man from Bet Lechem. Shimon Bar Kochba (Bar Koziva), the protégé of Rabbi Akiva. The majority of the leading rabbis of the time believed him to be the long awaited Mashiach. However his actions proved that he was not, and he was eventually killed. There was Shabtai Tzvi and others.

Are there any substantive, significant signs which will attest to the imminent appearance of the Mashiach?

The Mishna in tractate Sota portrays the religious and social

conditions which will exist in the period prior to the Mashiach's appearance. There will be a dramatic increase in the negative aspects of life. Great world-wide financial hardships, spearheaded by huge inflation. Breakdown of the extended and even the nuclear family. Torah wisdom and Torah scholars will be held in disdain. Corrupt governments and wars accompanied by profound feelings of despair for the future.

The Gemara (last chapter of tractate Sanhedrin) records statements of leading rabbanim regarding the advent of Mashiach.

Rabbi Abba states that a true sign is the revival of agriculture in Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Chanina suggests that a telltale sign is when it will be difficult to acquire fish for an ailing person. My understanding of this is that from a halachic point of view no food is more accommodating than fish, and certainly for one who is ill. However, in the time of the Mashiach the chumrot [halachic severities] will be such as to make it difficult to find a fish for an ailing person.

Other opinions range from lack of courtesy to dishonest actions of judges and police. One rabbi has the destruction of the walls of Rome as a sign, which could mean the downfall of the Vatican in Rome.

I would like to suggest a condition which I believe will signal the beginning of the Mashiach's appearance.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 97b) relates a basic controversy between two leading tana'im – Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua.

R. Eliezer believes that salvation will come only when the Jewish people will do teshuva. HaShem will not initiate any act of forgiveness or return to the Holy Land, except as a reaction to our teshuva initiative.

R. Yehoshua disputes this, claiming that when a certain point in time is reached, and the Jewish nation will not have done teshuva, HaShem will cause a situation which will force us to return to the Torah. This will be done by HaShem initiating the rise of a despotic leader whose decrees will be even harsher than those of Haman, forcing us to return to HaShem.

The situation which I believe R. Yehoshua is referring to is the rise of Hitler, which proved that we Jews have no place in the galut, even with the most enlightened of the gentiles. The Shoah aroused in many of Am Yisrael the need to leave the galut and return home.

However the teshuva process, as impressive as it is, still has a long way before it can achieve its full goals.

Many Jews in Eretz Yisrael are far from observing the Shulchan Aruch, with the powerful claim that their total presence in the Holy Land makes them better Jews than the holiest rabbi who chooses to remain in the galut.

In the galut, the vast majority of rabbis and their observant congregants, students and disciples have little if any desire to come home. Teshuva for them is the physical return to the Land given to us by the Creator Himself.

Both parties – the proud Israeli nationalist and the anti-Eretz Yisrael spiritual leaders in the galut – have a long way to go before they can be considered yir'ay shamayim (God fearing Jews).

What will make them so?

Here comes into play the belief of R. Yehoshua, that HaShem will initiate our return to teshuva.

It will come about through the isolation of Medinat Yisrael by the world's nations. Boycotts, divestment and sanctions will be the New Testament of the nations. The United States and

Europe, the Moslem nations and most of Africa and Asia will join in. While the Medina will be wrestling with our difficulties, the Jews in the lands of our adversaries will be the objects of anti-Semitic acts, similar to those experienced by their grandparents in Europe.

When the Israelis will realize that we have to look elsewhere for our salvation, they will lift up their eyes to the shamayim, as our ancestors had done so many times in the past.

At this point HaShem will command the Mashiach to appear and reverse all history, when the Jewish nation's superior status as God's chosen people will become obvious to all.

How Can We Ignore the Call?

Rambam (Melachim chapter 11) states that the Mashiach will lead the people in Eretz Yisrael to military victory and return the hearts of the people to Torah and mitzvot. He will restore the Davidic dynasty, rebuild the Holy Temple and renew the sacrificial service, and more.

Our belief in the Mashiach affected people in different ways. For some it was the straw they grasped at in order to make life bearable. For others, including many rabbinic leaders, it was and is a paralyzing, dysfunctional concept. A concept which states "do nothing for your self-salvation and self-emancipation; but wait for the Mashiach to perform these things for you. Don't leave the shtetles and cities of Poland, Lithuania etc., for the Holy Land until the Mashiach brings you there on a magic carpet". And this "do nothing" state cost the lives of countless Jews in the Shoah.

Today, the reality is even more absurd than it was in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century. Then we did not know what the anti-Semite was capable of; whereas today we do know and spiritual leaders in the galut are repeating the hollow,

baseless calls to remain in the galut and wait while the gates are open and Rachel (Yirmiyahu 31) beckons to her children to return to her.

How sad! How fraught with terminal danger for our brothers and sisters in the galut who choose to ignore the messages of HaShem to His children to come home while it is still possible.

We have felt the tochacha in its terrifying reality.

How can one ignore the call to come home now?

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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